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ABSTRACT

This digest is intended to guide parents and teachers in helping children deal with the attacks of September 11, 2001 through the use of literature. It begins with suggestions, guidelines, and strategies which parents and teachers can use to help children deal with the tragedy, and it discusses the role of literature in helping children at a time of national disaster. The second part of the digest offers resources intended to help children understand and appreciate cultural differences through the use of literature, as well as to provide materials that will help children cope with the stresses in their lives. (Contains links to 17 Web sites.) (RS)

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By Mei-Yu Lu

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN A TIME OF NATIONAL TRAGEDY

By Mei-Yu Lu

While America recovers from the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, parents and educators are seeking assistance to help children cope with the impact of this national tragedy. This Digest is intended to guide parents and teachers in helping children deal with this issue through the use of literature. It begins with suggestions, guidelines, and strategies which parents and teachers can use to help children deal with this tragedy, and it discusses the role of literature in helping children at a time of national disaster. The second part of this Digest offers resources intended to help children understand and appreciate cultural differences through the use of literature, as well as to provide materials that will help children cope with stresses in their lives and in particular, the events that took place on September 11th, 2001.

Suggestions to Help Children Deal and Heal

The following suggestions for parents and educators will help children deal with the national tragedy. They were developed by adopting recommendations from the following organizations: the National Association of School Psychologists (2001), the National Education Association (2001), and the National Mental Health Association (2001).

* *Give assurance and support, but be open and honest with children.* While adults want to help children ease anxiety, false promises, such as "It won't happen to us" will not help children. Instead, adults should let children know that disasters such as that which occurred on September 11 are rare, and that adults work hard to protect them. Spend time with your children and stay close to them, especially the younger children.

* *Allow children time and provide activities for them to express their feelings.* While different children may exhibit a broad range of reactions to the events of September 11th, they all need a variety of channels through which to express their feelings. Encourage children to express their feelings concerning the events using such methods and media as storytelling, drawing, writing, sculpting, singing, plays, or puppet shows. Allow children time to reflect upon and share their feelings.

* *Be patient with children's possible regressive behavior.* Traumatic events may cause some children to exhibit regressive behaviors, which they had outgrown long ago. Adults need to be understanding and try to find outlets for children to express their feelings. These behaviors are usually temporary, lasting for only a few days or a couple of weeks. If the regressive behaviors persist, and children exhibit excessive anxiety, contact the school's psychologist, social worker, or counselor.

* *Monitor media exposure.* While adults may want to closely monitor the unfolding of events, children of primary grades or younger may be frightened by the news footage. So, consider monitoring the amount and degree of media exposure. Adults may watch the news with older children, then discuss the events, and listen as they express their feelings.

* *Resume daily routine as soon as possible.* Routines give children a sense of security and help them to regain order in their life.

More Resources for Parents and Teachers: Guidelines and Strategies

Coping with a National Tragedy
http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisis_0911.html
From the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). NASP provides resources that offer useful information on what to look for in children, what to say, and how adults can help. Current topics addressed include coping with terrorism, promoting tolerance, recognizing severe trauma reaction, managing anger and other strong emotions, preventing suicide, school memorials, children and war, and helping children with special needs cope. Some handouts are translated into other languages.

Crisis Communications: Guide and Toolkit
http://www.nea.org/crisis/
From the National Education Association. This Guide and Toolkit provides resources to empower those facing crises and to guide their school communities toward hope, healing, and renewal.

Resources for Children and Their Parents and Educators Dealing with the Tragic Events of September 11, 2001
http://www.ala.org/alsc/dealing_with_tragedy.html
From the American Library Association. This site provides a compilation of materials to aid parents, teachers, and caregivers who wish to discuss with children and teens the terrorist attacks on Tuesday, September 11, 2001

Teaching Students about Terrorism and Related Resources
http://askeric.org/Virtual/Qa/archives/Subjects/Social_Studies/Current_Events/tragedy.html
In light of recent events, AskERIC has compiled a list of resources for educators and parents to help students cope with and discuss this tragedy.

What Children's Literature Can Offer Us

While we learn about the individuals who are responsible for the September 11th tragic events, we need to help children understand that it is not appropriate to make assumptions and use labels about a group of people based on their race, ethnicity, religious background, or national origin (NAEYC, 2001). Children's literature offers an avenue to help children develop understanding of people of different backgrounds, as well as deal with tragedies and stressful situations. Resources in this section provide information on selecting and using literature to help children cope with personal and social issues, develop positive and accurate attitudes toward people of different backgrounds, and express their feelings regarding this national tragedy.

Using Literature to Help Children Cope with Problems. ERIC Digest
http://eric.indiana.edu/www/ericdb/ed348148.htm
By Wei Tu, from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication. This digest provides information on the role of literature in helping children deal with personal and social issues, as well as offers suggestions, criteria, and resources for parents and educators for selecting appropriate literature to help children cope with problems they encounter in their lives.

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Multicultural Children's Literature in Elementary Classrooms
http://eric.indiana.edu/www/digbib/digprint.cgi?filename=d133.txt
By Mei-Yu Lu, from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication. This digest provides information on the importance of multicultural literature in children's development, as well as offers guidelines and resources for teachers and parents to select appropriate multicultural literature for children.

Our Heroes by Edinger and Terpening Houses
http://www.dalton.org/ms/4th/heroes/index.html
From Edinger House at The Dalton School, New York. This site provides examples of how teachers can integrate into their curriculum the events of September 11th. As part of a class project, the children in a 4th grade class were asked to draw and to write a paragraph explaining their definitions of heroes. They were also asked to give examples from real life in response to their study of E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*.

Bibliographies and Materials for Children

Exposure to quality multicultural literature helps children appreciate the idiosyncrasies of other ethnic groups, eliminate cultural ethnocentrism, and develop multiple perspectives. In this section, a list of resources related to people of Islamic faith and from the Arabic world is selected. With this information, we hope to help children develop an accurate and realistic understanding of Muslim culture and people from the Arabic World, instead of generating stereotypes based on a small group of people who are responsible for the national tragedy. In addition, a list of materials that help children deal with the tragic events is included.

Materials That Help Children Understand Islamic Culture and the Arabic world

Among the multicultural children's literature published each year in the United States, materials on and about the Arabic world and Islamic culture have been underrepresented (Lems, 1999). Although famous Arabic Nights tales, such as Aladdin, have gained popularity in America, little information is available on the daily life of the Arabic and the Islamic people in children's literature (Lems, 1999). Dowd (1992) stresses the values of literature in helping children develop an accurate understanding of people from other cultures, and she argues that "from reading, hearing, and using culturally diverse materials, young people learn that beneath surface differences of color, culture or ethnicity, all people experience universal feelings of love, sadness, self-worth, justice and kindness (p. 220)." It is therefore, important that children have access to quality literature that provides an authentic and positive portrayal of the Arabic World and Islamic culture. In the following section, we provide websites that collect and link to such information. Parents and educators can make use of these materials to read along with the children at home and in school.

Information and Stories about Islam and Muslims
http://www.acpl.lib.in.us/Childrens_Services/islam.html
Compiled by the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana. This website provides an extensive list of books and links which address Islamic Culture.

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The Arab World and Arab Americans
http://www.ala.org/BookLinks/v09/arab.html
By Kristin Lems, from *Book Links*, November 1999 9 (2). This article provides an excellent annotated bibliography (picture books, folktales, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction) of children's literature set in Arabic countries. It also includes a fine bibliography and materials that address Arab Americans and their culture.

Afghanistan for Kids
http://www.public.asu.edu/~apnilsen/afghanistan4kids/
By Don & Aileen P. Nilsen at Arizona State University. The Nilsen's lived with their three children in Kabul between 1967 and 1969. This site is intended for use by adults and children who want to learn about aspects of Afghanistan, such as its food, stories, and clothing.

Materials That Help Children Deal and Heal

Materials in this section are intended to help children cope with their personal and social lives, focusing on the national tragedy.

Recommended books for children, parents and caregivers
http://www.hclib.org/pub/reader2/reader/coping.html
From Hennepin County Library, Minnetonka, Minnesota. For those concerned about talking to children regarding the national tragedy on September 11th. This site offers books, videos and web sites as resources.

Books on Tragedy, Trauma, and Loss
http://www.cbcbooks.org/html/cbc_booklist.html
From the Children's Book Council, in cooperation with the Council's member publishers. Provides a list of books which parents and teachers can use to help children deal with the tragedy, trauma, and loss resulting from the September 11th events.

Coping With Violence
http://www.ala.org/BookLinks/v09/violence.html
By Sally Driscoll from *Book Links*, September 1999 v9 n1.
Provides an annotated list of books (K-12) for helping children deal with violence.

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Lems, K. (1999). The Arab World and Arab Americans. *Book Links*, 9 (2), 31-39.
National Association for the Education of Young Children: Helping Children Cope with Disaster
http://www.naeyc.org/coping_with_disaster.htm
National Association for School Psychologists: Coping with a National Tragedy
http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisis_0911.html
National Mental Health Association: Coping Resources
http://www.nmha.org/reassurance/when_to_seek_help.cfm
National Education Association: Helping children cope with national tragedy
http://www.unewswire.com/topnews/Current_Releases/0911-130.html

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